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President: Mr. Mérorès ..... (Haiti)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions on the theme "The regional dimension of the themes of the high-level segment of 2008" (E/2008/15)

1. **The President** said that the dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions would consider, from the regional perspective, the themes of the annual ministerial review on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development" and the thematic discussion on "Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development, taking into account current challenges".

2. **Mr. Sha** Zukang (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), speaking in his capacity as Convener of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, said that the perspectives of the regional commissions were important to the work of the United Nations because there was an essential policy link between the global debate on the issues mentioned by the President and the needs and priorities of specific regions. As the Secretary-General had noted in his report on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/2008/15), the regional commissions were consulting with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on better collaboration to serve the new functions of the Economic and Social Council, notably the annual ministerial reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum, including through regional meetings in preparation for the global events. The Department would do its best to further strengthen that collaboration and, during the coming year, would work with the World Health Organization and other relevant bodies to help the Council focus on the theme of the 2009 annual ministerial review: "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health".

3. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)), making a slide presentation on the topic "Energy security and sustainable development in Asia-Pacific", said that with global oil prices at an all-time high of $140 per barrel, the Asia-Pacific region was caught between rising fossil fuel prices and the imperatives of climate change. It was urgent to shift towards a new energy paradigm; it was still possible to meet the urgent needs encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while protecting the natural environment and the climate for future generations.

4. Through rapid economic growth as a region-wide strategy, the Asia-Pacific region had risen as a global production centre. However, there had been insufficient reinvestment in order to improve the basic living standards of its people and the quality of its environment. The region had an ecological deficit: it occupied 40 per cent of the global land surface, its permanent crop land per capita was less than 80 per cent of the global average, its biologically productive area per capita was less than 60 per cent of that average, it had the lowest fresh water availability per capita of any region, its forest areas were decreasing and its spectacular economic growth over the past decade had been fuelled by an energy consumption rate that was 20 per cent greater than the world average for that period. Even in 2004 and 2005, when oil prices had risen, its energy demand had grown at double the world average, largely as a result of rapid economic expansion in East, North-East, South and South-West Asia. Consequently, energy prices had skyrocketed as demand outstripped supply.

5. Energy insecurity in the world's most populous region posed a serious economic, social, environmental and political threat to global sustainable development and achievement of the MDGs. Rising energy consumption to fuel rapid industrialization was linked with economic growth that minimized market costs and maximized profits. Because market prices did not fully reflect ecological costs, there was an ecological efficiency gap that could undermine the long-term sustainability of industrial development. Furthermore, rising energy prices linked to depreciation of the United States dollar, in which oil, gas and coal were traded, could lead to a recession; countries with special needs were the most vulnerable.

6. Energy security must also be safeguarded at the household level, since poor families were acutely vulnerable to price hikes. In the Asia-Pacific region, 1.7 billion people had no access to modern energy and were dependent on traditional biomass fuels such as kerosene, wood and dung. Girls and women were the hewers of wood and drawers of water to the detriment of their health, productivity and earning power. Thus, energy was key to the development of future generations. The prices of public transport and cooking

fuel had increased by 120 and 170 per cent, respectively and there was intense debate concerning the relationship between food and fuel prices and the net energy savings from biofuel production.

7. Rising emissions from energy consumption could accelerate climate change, including desertification, damage to water sources, forests and biodiversity, sea level changes and natural disasters. The resulting threat to human and animal health would be aggravated by population density.

8. Lastly, energy pricing was a politically sensitive issue, as seen from the protests sparked by sudden price hikes and subsidy withdrawals, and many countries' energy sectors suffered from weak governance and poor integration with other sustainable rural and urban development policies.

9. The region's growing and unsustainable dependence on fossil fuels made it vulnerable to high energy prices, damaged its economic growth prospects and increased its vulnerability to climate change. Fossil fuel consumption had been considered essential to economic growth, poverty reduction and addressing the problems set forth in the MDGs; however, that strategy might be undermining efforts to attain the development goals of growth, equity and inclusion.

10. The situation called for a paradigm shift to a virtuous cycle of sustainable energy through a greater reliance on renewable energy and energy efficiency improvement; and action to mitigate climate change. The intent was not to curtail energy consumption essential to growth, but only to discourage waste. High levels of growth could be achieved through more prudent use of energy by matching the different categories of use to the most appropriate, efficient supply options.

11. ESCAP proposed a six-pronged strategy for energy security and sustainable development. First, ecological costs should be internalized into energy price structures in order to stimulate energy efficiency innovation and investment in renewable energy. A fundamental tax reform was needed so that countries could maintain current levels of revenue by reducing income taxes and increasing energy taxes. Second, energy demand should be managed by focusing on production processes, recycling, reduction of energy-intensive materials, greater end-use appliance efficiency and lifestyle changes. That would entail new standards of efficiency, a combination of voluntary measures and regulation and a system of incentives and disincentives.

12. Third, investment in sustainable energy infrastructure should be promoted through fiscal and financial incentives and rationalization of energy price subsidies, and the commercial viability of investment in renewable energy should be improved by internalizing ecological costs into fossil fuel prices and investing in energy-efficient buildings and mass transit systems. Fourth, investment in research and development should be increased in order to encourage technology innovation and the development of renewable energy and power sources. Fifth, long-term competitiveness should be enhanced by adopting more energy-efficient technologies in order to reduce vulnerability to volatile energy prices. And, sixth, a long-term vision of distributed energy systems should be adopted in order to make renewable energy a large-scale replacement for conventional power generation and grids.

13. Projections to the year 2030, against a baseline scenario (which assumed a continuation of current trends without major change) showed that the aforementioned strategy could reduce overall energy demand by 11 per cent, increase the share of modern renewable energy in the overall energy mix from 9 per cent to 17 per cent, decrease carbon emissions by 55 per cent and reduce investment in energy infrastructure across the region from $9 trillion to $8.3 trillion.

14. ESCAP was committed to promoting regional cooperation for sustainable energy. An energy paradigm shift must be part of a broader shift from quantity to quality of growth, since energy was consumed as a means to meet larger economic, social and environmental needs; unless those needs were realigned, supply and consumption patterns could not change. All countries must pursue a common vision of a strategic regional cooperation framework for energy security that would benefit all; the strategy would fail if some countries were profligate while others were thrifty.

15. In the short to medium term, regional and subregional cooperation could promote energy security in the Asia-Pacific region in seven areas: multilateral dialogue among governments, the private sector, financial institutions and international organizations; long-term trade agreements on energy supply and

pricing between producer and consumer countries; building strategic energy reserves through coordinated stockpiling for emergency needs; transboundary energy projects for transporting fuel and transmitting electricity; technology transfer initiatives to accelerate renewable energy market expansion and energy efficiency improvement; a trans-Asian energy system, building on ongoing or planned subregional energy cooperation, which could be reviewed in order to balance grid investment against investment in renewable energy and pipelines and the future availability of oil and gas; and South-South cooperation in the sharing of knowledge on technologies and project-related resources.

16. With its region-specific knowledge, networks and ties with regional governments, ESCAP stood ready to pursue a programme that included policy studies, stakeholder consultations and policy dialogues, cooperation mechanisms and regional training programmes and pilot projects designed to test core concepts. In 2008, it had mandated its secretariat to promote renewable energy with a view to energy security and sustainable development in the region, focusing on technology transfer and capacity-building.

17. **Mr. Janneh** (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)), making a slide presentation on the topic "Food security, sustainable development and the MDGs in Africa", said that, although agriculture was still the backbone of most African economies, its contribution to output and income growth and food security had stagnated or declined owing to underinvestment. The food situation remained a major concern, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Since 1990, the number of people who suffered from chronic hunger had increased by over 20 per cent; despite commercial food imports amounting to more than $25 billion per year, in addition to food aid of $2 billion per year, the problem affected over 50 per cent of the population in Central Africa, 41 per cent in Southern Africa and 38 per cent in East Africa. There were currently 39 World Food Programme (WFP) protracted relief and recovery operations in Africa, and food insecurity was worsening as a result of global food price inflation, erratic weather patterns and continuing conflicts. It was therefore unlikely that the continent would achieve the MDG goal of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.

18. Food insecurity was driven by a number of factors. Agriculture in Africa had long been undercapitalized and was predominantly a subsistence activity. There was little use of fertilizers and modern seeds, low adoption of new technologies and declining productivity. Less than 6 per cent of arable land was under irrigation, compared with 40 per cent in Asia; fertilizer use in sub-Saharan Africa stood at 9 per cent of the world average; and its crop yields were less than half those of other developing regions. At the same time, the population was growing more rapidly than that of any other region; it had more than doubled between 1975 and 2005 and was expected to reach 1.1 billion by 2025. The urban population was growing at an average rate of 5 per cent and would more than double in size from 294 million in 2000 to 742 million by 2030. That change was fuelled in part by poverty-induced rural-to-urban migration that led to expansion of urban space and human settlement programmes at the cost of a reduction in agricultural land.

19. Urban population growth and improved income had increased the demand for high-value food commodities such as wheat, dairy and meat products and processed food, placing greater pressure on the supply system. Per capita food production had declined and the failure to develop a meaningful agro-processing industry and agribusiness sector had widened the gap between the growing demand for processed food and regional production and supply, mostly in the form of raw commodities.

20. Climate change was expected to exacerbate poverty and hunger on the continent. Although its impact would vary by region, virtually all agro-ecological zones in Africa would suffer reduced agricultural productivity as a result of global warming, decreased precipitation and the resulting soil degradation and dust storms. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had projected that warming by an additional 0.4 degrees Celsius would shorten the crop-growing period by more than 20 per cent in the Sahel region as a whole and by more than 50 per cent in many African countries by 2020. Increased desertification would affect the northern part of the continent, resulting in serious water shortages and adverse consequences for the agriculture and forestry sectors. Wildlife and wetlands of international importance were also under threat in Southern Africa.

21. There were various policy options for remedial action. First, agriculture must be repositioned as a

central element of poverty reduction and growth strategies through sustainable modernization and rural transformation; bold action from African governments was needed in the areas of technology, infrastructure, institutions and policies. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) provided a coherent framework for investment in those areas with a view to extending the agricultural area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems; building rural infrastructure and trade-related capacities; increasing food supply and reducing hunger through improved policies and social safety nets; and improving agricultural research, technology dissemination and adoption.

22. CAADP had been endorsed by all governments at the July 2003 African Union Summit in Maputo. They had agreed to adopt sound policies and committed themselves to allocating at least 10 per cent of national budgetary resources to agricultural and rural development by 2008. To date, however, only four countries had met that commitment. Domestic sources, both government and private sector, must be mobilized and support from development partners must be forthcoming. Policies and investments in agriculture and rural development should integrate climate change concerns systematically; agriculture was part of both the problem and the solution, since it both contributed to greenhouse gases and offered opportunities for carbon mitigation.

23. Second, limited access to energy and poor infrastructure, compounded by rising oil prices, made it difficult for African countries to trigger a meaningful agricultural revolution. Efforts should focus on designing and implementing energy access scale-up mechanisms using supply schemes that promoted the development of local entrepreneurship and the use of indigenous energy resources; enhancing institutions' bioenergy and resource development capacities with a view to poverty reduction, energy security and sustainable development; providing regional economic communities with resources and capacity-building for the harmonization of national policies in order to promote regional energy production and trade; and supporting the establishment of flexible, accelerated investment schemes for priority projects such as hydropower systems.

24. The objectives of the European Union-Africa Partnership on Infrastructure included reducing the cost and improving the quality of transport services by removing infrastructure and non-physical barriers to the free movement of goods and people, strengthening customs operations and improving maintenance of transport assets; developing sustainable uses of available water resources in order to meet basic needs and improving integrated water resource management at the local, river basin and catchment, national and transboundary levels; developing access to sustainable, affordable energy services for the economic and social sectors, improving policy frameworks and institutional capacity, and facilitating investments essential to cross-border interconnections, grid extension and rural distribution; and bridging the digital divide by providing access to affordable information and communication technology through support for regulatory reforms, capacity-building and the development of pan-African broadband infrastructure and non-commercial e-services linked to regional and national networks.

25. Third, the decline in agriculture's share in the World Bank portfolio, from 39 per cent in the 1970s to less than 10 per cent in 2000, must be reversed; official development assistance (ODA) flows to agriculture must be increased, focusing on the whole food supply chain; ODA from non-traditional sources, such as India and China, should give priority to food security; the European Union and the United States of America should deal expeditiously with the agricultural subsidies problem in their regions; major food exporters with export restrictions should lift them; development cooperation should support research and development in the field of African agriculture; and the Doha round of trade negotiations should be given a new lease on life.

26. In an increasingly global economy, the current fragmentation of Africa's food and agricultural system along subregional, national and subnational borders did not provide for economies of scale at, and of coordination among, all stages of the commodity chain or for complementary diversification and specialization among countries and subregional groupings that would increase the competitiveness and interregional trade potential of African agriculture. CAADP provided a framework for consensual policies and priorities for African governments, regional organizations, farmers, private agribusiness and development partners, but sustainable transformation would require promoting public-private partnerships in a regional integration

approach with a view to economies of scale and complementarity in resource endowments based on comparative and competitive advantages beyond national or regional economic commission boundaries.

27. Through its strategic partnership with the African Union and the African Development Bank (ADB), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was providing technical support for efforts to establish an African common market for agricultural products. South-South cooperation was focusing on peer learning and experience-sharing on successful practices, policies and programmes worthy of imitation by other developing countries. The Food Security and Sustainable Development Division of ECA offered States an array of services, including raising policymakers' awareness of the urgent need to prioritize agricultural development and to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development into development planning. Several bilateral and multilateral initiatives focused on rural development in Africa, but it was not clear how they could be harmonized in order to reach the CAADP goal of 6 per cent annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in the area of agriculture.

28. For that reason, ECA had consistently advocated the federation and articulation of investment in the CAADP pillars, within a framework of greater regional integration, focusing on systematic development of the value chains of strategically important food and agricultural commodities. It worked in partnership with the African Union Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and, together with the African Union and ADB, was championing a policy framework for strengthening land rights and enhancing both productivity and natural resource management, including by developing benchmarks and indicators on land reform.

29. ECA was in the process of establishing the African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) in order to help African countries mainstream climate change concerns into their development policies and framework. Through analytical work, advocacy, capacity-building, technical assistance, knowledge-sharing and peer learning, the Centre would help deliver on the policy component of the Climate Information for Development Needs (ClimDev-Africa) programme, which ECA had initiated in partnership with the African Union Commission, ADB and the Global Climate Observing System (CGOS), with a view to improved climate-related observations and data, information services and risk management practices for climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, energy, water resources, health and infrastructure.

30. In conclusion, he called for urgent action to improve food security in Africa in a manner consistent with the objectives of sustainable development as articulated in the outcome statements of the relevant international conferences. Development cooperation was important, but African leadership was crucial. Malawi was an example of success in that area: through determination and appropriate policies and with support from the international community, it had become essentially food self-sufficient.

31. **Mr. Belka** (Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)), making a slide presentation on the topic "Energy efficiency's contribution to reducing world poverty: The role of the regional commissions", said that the world's energy use was likely to double by 2045. Although energy consumption per unit GDP had decreased by 1.3 per cent annually between 1980 and 2006, that decline had been essentially cancelled out by the growth in the world's population. Over 80 per cent of energy was produced from carbon-dioxide-producing fossil fuels and without a major policy or technological change, that situation was unlikely to improve in the next 25 years. Economists and social scientists agreed that the damage was greatest in the countries closest to the equator and that the poorest populations, who were the least able to adapt with irrigation and increased fertilizer use, were the most affected. Agricultural subsistence farmers, who were in the majority in some of the least developed countries, would be the greatest sufferers. Disputes over scarce water resources and worsening poverty would fuel intra- and inter-State conflicts, leading to increased out-migration and the rapid spread of diseases.

32. It had been estimated that an increase in global temperature of 2.5 degrees centigrade would result in an annual GDP loss that would vary by country and by region. Some high-income countries might even benefit from increased global temperatures and the impact on transition economies such as China would be neutral, but low-income countries such as India and the African States would be severely affected.

33. The response to global warming should focus on identifying alternatives to fossil fuels; switching to fossil fuels that produced fewer carbon dioxide emissions and to carbon capture and sequestration; increased energy efficiency; and adaptation to climate change, which would prove to be the most difficult for the poorest countries and would be more costly than mitigation.

34. Noting that energy efficiency varied tremendously between countries, he compared the consumption of oil per $1 of GDP with per capita income. If all countries reached the average for their per capita income characteristics, total energy savings would be close to 20 per cent, if they reached the energy-efficient frontier, savings would increase to 42 per cent of current consumption. Globally, there was an enormous potential for energy savings. In a comparative analysis of the various methods of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, building insulation and sugar cane biofuel ranked among the most efficient sources of energy, actually with negative costs involved. Indeed, sugar cane biofuel did not produce food shortages. On the other hand, biodiesel and industrial carbon capture and storage (CCS) were the least efficient methods of reducing emissions.

35. ECE promoted policy dialogue and information exchange with respect to energy efficiency and tried to set good examples through its projects. The fact that market economies were twice as efficient as economies in transition, in terms of energy use, had led to the recognition that the sharing of technology, expertise and experience should be encouraged. In 1991 an Energy Efficiency Programme had been established to provide technical cooperation and financing to 24 ECE countries, some of which were now reducing carbon dioxide emissions by the equivalent of 68,000 automobiles a year. The current Energy Efficiency 21 project was being implemented at a cost of $10.5 million, and was aimed at identifying and developing investment projects, stimulating discussion on policy reform and financing energy efficient investments that were managed by private sector specialists. Since energy efficiency projects outside the European Union were often perceived by the private sector as being high-risk, a joint public-private equity investment fund, with assets of approximately $2 billion, was established for projects in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The Russian Federation had also expressed interest in such projects. ECE had recently received a grant to help expand the energy efficiency project to other regional commissions, which would create a network of regional hubs of information and capacity-building.

36. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), speaking on the socio-economic and environmental impact of soaring food and oil prices, said that since 2006, the average cost of food and energy had increased by 67.8 per cent, and 40 per cent respectively. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the price index for food had risen faster than the general consumer price index. Country disaggregated statistics had shown that countries that were both net importers of food and oil producers had experienced a rate of food inflation that surpassed the general rate of inflation.

37. The structural and temporary sources of the problem could be traced to financial volatility and a slowdown in global growth; a surge in inflation rates; increased world demand generated by Asia; and supply shocks, arising from the decision of some countries to concentrate on supplying their domestic markets rather than on exports. Other contributing factors included the hike in the price of oil, oil-based agrochemicals and other inputs, increased demand for biofuels, and the effect of agricultural subsidies paid to United States and European producers. Speculative purchases on futures markets had also played a key role in generating the food crisis.

38. Extreme weather conditions in the major food-producing regions of Europe and Australia, combined with frost and unusually hot conditions in the Western hemisphere, had been partially responsible for poor yields in maize, wheat and oats in recent years.

39. Regarding biofuel, she said that a distinction should be drawn between the production of ethanol from maize — a rising trend in the United States of America — and from sugar cane in Latin America and the Caribbean. While it might be true that the production of ethanol from maize competed with food cultivation in the United States of America, that was not at all the case in Latin America and the Caribbean. In general, in the medium and long terms, other forms of energy would inevitably replace oil production, and States must be prepared to quickly adapt to the changes ahead through their approach to innovations, technology and investment. As a group, the countries

of the region were net exporters of food, but many of them were facing crucial problems, including undernourishment.

40. In mitigating the economic consequence of the global crisis, namely inflation, States had very few tools at their disposal. Central banks worldwide were carefully considering their response to inflation and were taking different approaches to the problem. There was no doubt that rising food and oil prices would cause consumption to contract, particularly among groups that had a low capacity for savings.

41. Even though the region had managed to reduce extreme poverty from 44 per cent in 2002 to 35 per cent in 2007, the latter figure still represented 194 million persons. It was predicted that the regressive impact of income distribution and the escalating price of staples, which had risen on average by 16 per cent, would cause extreme poverty to grow more than 3 percentage points if no active public policy was adopted. If governments took action, by raising the income of the poor by 0.5 per cent, poverty would rise, at best, by 2 points, a level that was still considered rather high.

42. With regard to the impact on sustainable development and the environment, there was likely to be even more pressure to put native forests into agricultural production, as land was increasingly sought for cultivation. In that context, there had been some discussion about the possibility for States to set vast tracts of land aside as agricultural reserves for food production. There were already signs that pollution by agrochemicals and pressure on already stressed watersheds had begun to take their toll. Similarly, the mix of conditions that could be regarded as climate change drivers, such as deforestation, soil erosion and methane, had increased significantly. The vulnerable centres from which food crops originated therefore needed to be protected.

43. The region was somewhat prepared for the current crisis because anti-cyclical macroeconomic policies had been adopted and reserves had been built up during the period of growth although it was still vulnerable in some areas, particularly in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. Household incomes had shrunk as a direct and indirect result of the slowdown in the United States economy. In the short term, countries should adopt measures to buffer food price increases in domestic markets and to improve income; in the long term, they should adopt policies to sustainably increase supply and productivity. Investment in research and development, climate change mitigation and the strengthening of extension services were of paramount importance.

44. **Mr. AlDafa** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)), in presenting an overview of the energy sector in Western Asia, said that most countries of the region had significant energy resources, with oil and gas accounting for 56 and 30 per cent, respectively, of world reserves. The region also enjoyed large solar and wind biomass reserves. In 2006, the main energy production was approximately 34 million barrels of oil a day. Installed electricity generation capacity was dominated by thermal power generation.

45. There were wide disparities in the levels of energy consumption, but between 2002 and 2006 the average growth rate was 5.6 per cent. The transport sector was the main consumer of natural gas and petroleum products, and the biggest consumers of electricity were the residential and industrial sectors. In spite of the region's overall wealth in energy resources, around 10 per cent of the population did not have access to energy services. An additional 15 per cent in rural or urban poor areas were highly underserved; consequently, increased accessibility was an issue of great priority.

46. Since the adoption of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, States of the region had made concerted efforts to achieve sustainability in the energy sector through the adoption of policies and codes of practice, energy audits and the implementation of relevant field projects. There had so far been limited use of renewable energy, but renewable energy electricity plants and wind farms were active, and there were plans to set up more of them throughout the region and to establish research centres. Furthermore, a full-scale renewable energy community had been created, within the framework of which, a number of States had set targets of generating up to 20 per cent electricity from renewable sources by the year 2020.

47. The countries of the region had increased the share of natural gas in their overall energy consumption mix to 42 per cent. In that regard, he described new ventures undertaken by various States to ensure a cleaner and more efficient use of fuels, and to

expand electricity grid coverage and the current network of pipelines.

48. ESCWA had supported Member States in improving their energy sector sustainability by facilitating and promoting policy formulation, strengthening regional cooperation and enhancing their capacities in areas such as energy efficiency, renewable energy and cleaner fuels. Though the ESCWA region did not contribute significantly to global warming, it would be disproportionately affected by climate change, and, in 2007, member countries had expressed their commitment to take action on mitigation and adaptation measures by adopting the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change. Energy production and consumption were the main sources of CO_2 emissions in the region.

49. ESCWA would continue to provide support to member countries in integrating climate change into their national sustainable energy strategies. Among other upcoming activities, it planned to assess the effects of climate change on economic and social development in the region and to prepare an Arab framework action plan on climate change, in partnership with other regional bodies and United Nations agencies.

50. **Mr. Kebret** (Observer for Ethiopia), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that he agreed with the Executive Secretary of ECA on the importance of long-term investment in agriculture and infrastructure. That investment should not just be in the form of financial support but should also consist of other inputs such as improved seeds, microcredit, market access and transfers of technology to help small-scale farmers increase their production and sell it outside their national markets.

51. He welcomed the establishment of five subregional offices by ECA and wanted to know whether there was any coordination between those offices and the regional economic communities. Given the growing importance of the regional economic communities in Africa, particularly in terms of building closer regional integration, he wondered whether any special steps had been taken to strengthen them. He also asked what progress had been made in terms of strengthening ECA itself in the areas of finance and human resources, especially as regards implementing best practices from other offices. Noting that carbon finance was an engine for greater employment, he asked how the concept could be disseminated in other countries, particularly developing countries. In his view, the West Asian countries could share their experience in that area with other regional organizations.

52. **Mr. Ali** (Malaysia) asked the Executive Secretary of ESCAP whether, in her assessment, countries were ready to change their lifestyles to achieve a paradigm shift. He also noted that some regional commissions, such as ECE, had more experience in the management of carbon emissions. Noting that it would be pointless to duplicate efforts, he said that there was room to exploit synergies between the different regional organizations.

53. **Mr. Sul** Kyung-hoon (Republic of Korea), noting that many other United Nations operational agencies were involved in the area of sustainable development, which gave rise to possible duplication of efforts, wondered whether regional-level strategies were in fact required in that area and what coordination mechanisms existed within each regional commission to ensure an effective strategy. He would also like to know what projects the regional commissions were implementing to enhance private sector participation. He asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC whether the Commission had any statistical data to prove that biofuel production from sugar cane would not adversely affect the amount of arable land available for food production.

54. **Ms. Viotti** (Brazil) said that her country recognized many of the public policy challenges set out in the presentation by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC. She was pleased to note that the Executive Secretary saw investment in research and development for efficient and sustainable food and biofuel production as a priority and asked whether she had any other thoughts on how to proceed in that area. Responding to the question by the representative of the Republic of Korea, she commented that increases in biofuel production in Brazil had occurred alongside increases in food production and had been achieved mainly through productivity gains. Biofuels accounted for a very small proportion of total arable land, and so even if production was expanded it would not compete with food production.

55. **Mr. St. Aimee** (Saint Lucia) said that he agreed with most of the public policy dialogue, especially in relation to extension services. The regional

commissions were not, however, paying sufficient attention to water resources management, which was a unifying component in sustainable development, since water was both an input in agriculture and a potential source for energy development, as well as being affected by climate change. On the question of interaction between the various regional commissions, he believed such collaboration would be particularly fruitful between ECLAC and ESCAP, owing to similarities in the size of their member countries. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) had an important role to play, since the food crisis in some cases required a focus on food distribution and transformation, rather than food production.

56. **Mr. Loizaga** (Paraguay) said that, as a net food exporter, his country played a key role in food security, while as a net energy importer and a landlocked country, it found it particularly difficult to get to sources of energy for development. There was therefore a need to find new energy alternatives. The cultivation of sugar cane for ethanol production was a means of integrating disadvantaged segments of the rural population into the national economy and, given the relatively small proportion of land used for biofuel production, he did not think that biofuel production contributed to food shortages. Paraguay, in its capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, welcomed the support given by the regional commissions ahead of the midterm review in October 2008 and stressed the need for developing landlocked countries, small island States and least developed countries to be given priority consideration.

57. **Mr. Janneh** (Executive Secretary, ECA) said that the points made by the observer for Ethiopia regarding agriculture and infrastructure were already reflected in various national programmes. ECA also fully accepted the importance of coordination with the regional economic communities. The subregional offices and regional economic communities worked very closely together and, where they were not co-located, liaison officers were placed in the regional economic communities to emphasize the closeness of the relationship with them. The strengthening of ECA itself was an ongoing process. Indeed, the Commission had repositioned itself on two main strategic pillars: to support the African agenda for integration and help Africa to move forward on the MDGs agenda. As well as receiving support from the United Nations itself, it benefited from a number of bilateral and multilateral partnerships and was planning to mobilize additional resources of $100 billion for its 2007-2009 business plan. He fully accepted the point made about carbon finance, indicating that the regional commissions were collaborating on that issue.

58. In response to the point made by the representative of the Republic of Korea about coordination and possible duplication, he said that the regional commissions were working closely together, holding several joint meetings a year, and were seeking to build a common knowledge platform to share best practices. As for private sector participation, there was now continuous consultation between the private and public sectors, with most countries realizing that the private sector was the engine of growth and development, and ECA itself had a private sector division.

59. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Secretary, ESCAP), on the issue of whether countries were ready for a paradigm shift, said that the development of a sustainable energy framework was now not just desirable but essential. The question was how to develop the vision of a lower carbon economy without sacrificing economic growth, since the population of the Asia and Pacific region included 640 million of the world's poorest people who still needed to share in the benefits of growth. With regard to knowledge sharing, ESCAP acted as a knowledge hub, bringing together expertise and serving as a platform for dialogue to provide policy options, as well as supporting members in terms of policy action. With regard to the question from the representative of the Republic of Korea on public sector participation, the private sector was now very active. A recent example was the Asian Business Forum that had brought together private sector companies to look at market-driven technology innovation as well as technology transfer, with a focus on energy security. Duplication had been greatly reduced and the commissions together could now be described as a pillar for South-South cooperation, acting as a conduit for the exchange of best practices between regions. The regional coordination mechanisms also existed to bring together the work of all United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies at regional and subregional level, in order to provide policy coherence and coordinated technical support.

60. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary, ECLAC) said, with reference to duplication, that ECLAC was working very closely with FAO and WFP, and there were also major opportunities for it to liaise with other regional agencies, as well as with the World Bank and regional banks. In that connection, and in response to the question on research and development raised by the representative of Brazil, she noted that the issue of financial opportunities for research and development should be raised at the Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, since, while financing for development certainly had some benefits, research and development was also very important, particularly in Latin America, where investment in that area was currently very low. As for policy dialogue with the private sector, one of the major steps taken by ECLAC in recent years was to establish public/private partnerships analysing relevant experience from other countries, which was very useful for public policy. On the question of biofuels, she said that ECLAC was developing productivity maps to establish how much arable land was being used to grow a given crop in each country. The cultivation of sugar cane in the region was nothing new and its use in biofuel production had resulted from a sharp fall in the sugar market in the 1980s. On the joint work of the regional commissions, it was important to understand what the conduits for exchanges of experience between the different regions were. In that respect, ECLAC interacted with global institutions, bringing its own regional realities to the discussions, and also with the various sectors, including the financial sector.

61. **Mr. Nebenzya** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation had consistently advocated strengthening the role of the regional economic commissions, particularly ECE and ESCAP, which were effectively the only universal representative bodies for socio-economic cooperation and integration in their respective regions. Bearing in mind that the sixty-fourth session of ESCAP recently held in Bangkok had confirmed a new structure for the activities of the Commission, the management of ESCAP should focus its efforts on those programmes that would produce real dividends for member States, especially with respect to transport, environmental protection and energy.

62. The Russian Federation, which cooperated actively with the regional economic commissions, would jointly organize with ECE and ESCAP the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) on 20 October 2008, as well as a SPECA economic forum on investment.

63. Despite the striking differences seen in regional development around the globe, all the regional economic commissions without exception should continue to focus on levelling the playing field for capacity development. In that respect, the real needs of the regional economic commissions should be sufficiently and fairly taken into account when building their future human and financial resource capacities. Notwithstanding the relatively high level of development of the Pan-European region as a whole, ECE should continue its productive and vital work to provide direct technical assistance to countries in need, primarily in Central Asia, Transcaucasia and South-East Europe.

64. In recent years, the regional dimension of the socio-economic work of the United Nations had increased the role of all its regional commissions, particularly ECA. Achieving the goals laid down in the ECA strategic framework for 2010-2011 would not only foster economic growth and prosperity for the entire African region, but also create conditions for the region to become fully integrated into the international economy.

65. **Mr. Meñez** (Philippines) said it was clear from all the presentations that the major issue was to find a sustainable development model that would promote growth without increasing food or energy prices, adversely affecting the environment or aggravating the effects of climate change. The lack of focused and sustainable investment in agriculture was one of the factors that contributed to the rise in food prices. That was important to countries such as the Philippines that had decided to become self-reliant in terms of food supply. He asked whether any analysis had been performed of the impact of investment on commercial agriculture. With regard to biofuels, the decision to produce a certain agricultural product did not depend solely on whether there was arable land available, but also on other factors, such as price: a farmer was fully at liberty to decide whether to grow crops for biofuel or crops for food, on the basis of the economic benefit that would accrue to him or her. He wondered whether the global price of sugar had reacted significantly to the increased acreage devoted to sugar cane for biofuel production. It was important that the regional

economic commissions, besides being repositories of knowledge, should work closely with individual countries within the region to try to produce tangible results with immediate impact. The commissions also had the role of transmitting knowledge from the global level to the national level.

66. **Mr. Matwang'a** (Observer for Kenya) pointed out that the underlying issue linking the food crisis and biofuels was land, which was the basic factor of production and was not in unlimited supply. It was necessary to find a way to make use of the land for such potentially beneficial initiatives as the production of biofuels without negatively affecting food production. He sought information on efforts being made for the regional economic commissions to interact with one another and share experience and best practices. Referring to the earlier statement that Africa, unlike other regions, was not likely to achieve the MDGs, he asked what Africa was not doing right, and what the African region could learn from the other regions. Pointing out that the motivations of the various stakeholders addressing the several crises were different, he said that there was therefore a need to develop guiding principles on the specific roles or expectations of each stakeholder in such endeavours.

67. **Ms. Handaruningrum** (Indonesia), noting that the role of the regional economic commissions was very important, suggested that they could play a significant part in developing a regional-level early warning system, which would assist in anticipating or even in preventing future food crises. Consideration had to be given to the modalities of operation of such a warning system, and paradoxically the food crisis, if managed properly, could bring profitable opportunities for small-scale farmers. Therefore, she emphasized the need to increase investment in the agricultural sector and to enhance cooperation between regional mechanisms. For instance, a mechanism could be developed to permit an exchange of views between farmers within a region, whose shared lessons learned could set directions for agricultural research.

68. **Ms. Williams** (Jamaica) said that the work of ECLAC should give special attention to food and energy security, given the far-reaching impact of high oil and food prices which threatened to reverse hard-earned gains. In recognition of the asymmetries among member States in the region, specifically between the Caribbean and Latin America, Jamaica urged the Commission to bear certain specificities in mind in implementing its work programme in the Caribbean, including creative industries, intellectual property, natural disasters, and regional integration and trade in terms of implementation of the CARICOM Single Market. Additional resources should be provided to strengthen the subregional office in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in terms of personnel in the areas of climate change and information and communication technology.

69. **Mr. Fautua** (New Zealand) expressed agreement with the description by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP of the work that would be needed to develop a common vision and plan of action for the region, having seen how much effort had been required to do so for just one country, his own. He sought information on how ESCAP intended to address the competing challenges facing its members — ranging from a high demand for energy in some countries in northern Asia to very serious concerns over the threats and challenges of climate change — in the small island developing States in the Pacific.

70. **Mr. Gibbs** (Barbados) said that the Caribbean countries favoured increased investment in agriculture as a way of increasing food security. In that regard, it was vital to complete the Doha round. On the issue of climate change, Barbados also wished to bring into focus the vulnerabilities of small island developing States and the impact that climate change was having on important components of their economies, in particular agriculture and tourism.

71. **Mr. Abdalhalmeem** (Sudan) asked the Executive Secretaries of ECA and ESCWA to comment on the possibility of the two Commissions initiating cooperation on the basis of the comparative advantage of the two regions in order to ensure energy and food security.

72. **Ms. Aitimova** (Kazakhstan) wondered whether ESCAP still intended to establish a subregional office in Central Asia and whether the Executive Secretary of ECE could give an update on SPECA.

73. **Mr. Belka** (Executive Secretary, ECE) observed that "duplication" was a word much in vogue. It referred to a situation in which people tried to do things in rivalry and without coordination, not to one in which they did things jointly, which was different. Everything ECE did was done in partnerships. He gave several examples of activities and projects that ECE was undertaking in partnership with other bodies, both

governmental and private, including some outside the region. Consequently, he urged caution in speaking disparagingly of "duplication". With regard to SPECA, it now comprised six working groups, which worked with countries, NGOs and think tanks. Its next Governing Council meeting would be in Moscow in October.

74. **Mr. Ishize** (Japan) said that it was very important to maintain and enhance the flow of commodities including food and energy, taking into account the interdependence between the exporting and importing countries. Also, in addressing the food crisis and the energy crisis, it was important to consider not only the supply and demand sides, but also to make the best use of what was already present. For example, food could be lost or wasted during transportation, and much energy was also wasted. He asked what the regional economic commissions were doing to reduce such wastage. He suggested that "synergy of cooperation" might be a better term than "duplication". Japan considered cooperation among regions to be very important, and looked forward to fruitful discussions at the seminar on triangular cooperation to be organized by ESCAP later in the year.

75. **Mr. AlDafa** (Executive Secretary, ESCWA) agreed with the representative of the Sudan that there was a need for cooperation between ECA and ESCWA. Indeed, the current crisis in fuel and food prices called for closer cooperation and coordination not only among the regional economic commissions but within the international community as a whole.

76. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Secretary, ESCAP) said that, with ESCAP covering such a vast and diverse region, she was grateful to the member States for permitting a subregional approach. The establishment of subregional offices was very much part of that approach; specifically, ESCAP intended to establish one in Central Asia, jointly with ECE. In response to the comment from the representative of New Zealand, she noted that each subregion focused on a very different range of issues. In the small island countries of the Pacific, the issue of concern was not just connectivity but also that of coming together in a regional framework in order to increase efficiency, coordinate bulk purchases and lower prices. China's focus was very much on energy efficiency, India's was to be a catalyst for clean technology, and so on. She agreed with the representative of Japan that it was extremely important to make better use of what was already extant. As that idea applied to agriculture, the next agricultural revolution had to focus on post-harvest technologies, such as improved rice-milling techniques. ESCAP was working very closely with its Technology Innovation Centre to enlist technology transfer so as to mitigate post-harvest losses.

77. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary, ECLAC) suggested that the Caribbean now had a tremendous opportunity in sugar. It had gone through a period of difficult market conditions, and indeed some Caribbean countries were now focusing on areas such as tourism, but the basis of the sugar industry was still present, and with the growth in sugar-based biofuels there could be exciting times ahead. The work of ECLAC in the Caribbean subregion would focus on two important areas: strengthening the office in Trinidad and Tobago and providing assistance with respect to natural disasters. The Caribbean was one of the areas most vulnerable to natural disasters, which had had devastating effects on countries' infrastructure and GDP. Also, as the representative of Saint Lucia had noted, water was going to be a critical element that would need to be considered along with food and oil in the future.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.